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Objects: Entropy and Temporality

Anthony Cioe

Virginia Commonwealth University

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OBJECTS: ENTROPY AND TEMPORALITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

ANTHONY CIOE

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Rhode Island School of Design, 2003

Director: JACK WAX

GLASS AREA LEAD PROFESSOR

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Acknowledgement

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Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iv
Artist Statement	v
Chapter	
1 CHAPTER 1 Artistic Chronology	#1
2 CHAPTER 2 Chronology of Work.....	#5
3 CHAPTER 3 Thesis.....	#7
4 CHAPTER 4 Influences.....	#11
List of References	#18
Vita.....	#20

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Anamorph for a Common Occurrence.....	#12
Figure 2: Anamorph for a Common Occurrence (detail).....	#12
Figure 3: Increment/Decrement.....	#13
Figure 4: Increment/Decrement (detail).....	#13
Figure 5: Pangaea.....	#14
Figure 6: Pangaea (detail).....	#14
Figure 7: Drift.....	#15
Figure 8: Irreversible.....	#16
Figure 9: Irreversible (Detail of digital print).....	#16
Figure 10: Duration.....	#17
Figure 11: Duration (detail)	#17

Artist Statement

The transparent qualities of glass lend to the creation of elements that suggest presence and absence. I often use glass as a surrogate for lost time or space in an object, comparable to the human prosthetic and the notion of a phantom limb. Recent objects of exploration have included broken bottles, fallen tree limbs, and a human skull. The practical knowledge I gained while working in a conservation lab has directly influenced the methodology for treating these objects of disrepair. My primary impetus is a desire to construct what has been lost during an objects existence and reveal sublime qualities. Looking for the spaces in-between things, I create sculpture and installations that transcend static objects beyond their corporeal existence, engage in the process of entropy, and negate it.

Artistic Chronology

From a very young age I appreciated hand made objects for their decorative and functional attributes. The life of an object vs. the life of its creator became of particular interest to me. For example, my father gave me a collection of hand-tied fishing flies as a gift. The man who tied the flies had long passed, but the flies could still function and catch fish. Thus, an interest in the afterlife of objects became a prevalent force in my work. During my undergraduate education at the Rhode Island School of Design, I focused on objects of disrepair, with my childhood collection of old broken bottle fragments as the first subjects of attention. I improvised a way in the glass blowing shop to repair missing parts to each broken vessel with clear hand blown glass. This *Bottle Repair* piece served as the impetus for an investigation in the conservation of objects in my studio.

After receiving my BFA, I began an internship in the Conservation Lab of the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design under Margaret Leveque. This experience introduced me to numerous conservation practices concerning the preservation and repair of ancient and contemporary objects. A project of particular interest was the conservation of a 2,500-year-old Egyptian mummy-and-coffin ensemble. My main job involved woodworking on the inner and outer coffins for the cartonnage (the plastered layers of linen or papyrus material that cover the mummified body). I was fascinated with the act of

recreating wooden nails filling holes where previous fragments were missing. In previous years, conservators had made the line between what was original in an object and what was repaired almost invisible. However, a contemporary approach is to make the discretion between old and new similar enough to be convincing, yet still recognizable to the viewer for educational purposes. This frame of thought struck a chord with me and inspired contemplation about the semblance of an object and its materiality.

As a result, my conservation experience served as a means to investigate my curiosity for characteristics inherent in the objects we worked on. They also served as a means to slightly steer myself away from the material glass, which I had so passionately studied in undergraduate school. This distancing soon failed, however. While working on the mummy, my mentor taught me how to concoct a homemade wood putty to fill voids within the wood of the coffin ensemble. This recipe was unique because its key ingredient (glass micro balloons) allowed minimum expansion and contraction, thus creating an archival wood putty. These glass micro balloons were not the same format of glass that I was accustomed to working with. This inspired me to rethink the makeup and role of glass within my own sculptures and installations.

In between stints in the conservation field, I participated in two residency programs: The Creative Glass Center of America at Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center in Millville, New Jersey; and an Arts/Industry Residency at Kohler Company in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. These programs served as a means to support the creation of my work as well as to connect to a community of new people involved in different art practices. The

Creative Glass Center allowed me to return to glassblowing and casting processes in larger scale, and at Kohler I gained artistic and engineering knowledge of slip-cast ceramic work within the factory. Each program proved to be a refreshing period of growth and allowed essential time for experimentation.

My final and most influential experience before arriving at VCU was a trip to Italy to further my studies in glass. Glassmaking in Italy began as early as the eighth century, existing in the Lagoon of Venice. Through the course of extensive trade through the eastern Mediterranean and in the Islamic territories of the Levant and North Africa, Venice acquired its first skills in glass production. By 1921, the Venetian's glass production skills had been heightened to a new unique level. In this same year, the government of Venice prohibited glass furnaces from the central islands of Venice and relocated the glass workers to the nearby island of Murano. This served to isolate the workers who had become masters of their process, in an effort to keep their techniques secret from foreigners.

It was in Murano that I served as a glassblowing apprentice to Maestro Davide Salvadore in an effort to experience the age-old tradition of apprenticeship to enhance my skills and cultural knowledge of the medium. My agenda was to absorb as much of the culture as possible and to live in the moment. It was difficult to leave what I felt was just the tip of the iceberg in terms of familiarizing myself with Murano and its people and I hope to return.

Beginning graduate school at VCU allowed me to focus on my studio work on a deeper, more thorough level than ever before. It provided almost uninterrupted time to experiment, and even to fail, in order to gain a greater knowledge of my art and myself. The diversity of the faculty on all floors (Sculpture, Craft/Material Studies and Painting) and accessibility to all mediums was a constant influence. This aspect of the MFA program was crucial for my development at VCU, and it is something I am very thankful for.

Chronology of Work

The work I created while living in Richmond continued to play off of the practice of conservation. I also used found objects from my surroundings. My objective was to create a body of work that was cohesive, yet diverse. When I first began collecting debris from the streets of Richmond I marveled at the tiny bits of pulverized glass that glistened in the sunlight. Given the attention and correct viewing angle, I was entertained with the ability of this mundane material to radiate such beauty. And I immediately compared the happenstance twinkling of the glass particles to stars in the night sky. In the studio I encased the particles in clear acrylic, as seen in *Winter Night Sky*. The large frame of acrylic encasing the found glass was suspended from the gallery ceiling and lighted so that the glass could twinkle just as it had in the street as well as reference the stars it was portraying.

I began to think about the possibilities of using broken glass from bottles found on the street. At this time I began studying the practice of anamorphosis, which began in the Italian Renaissance 600 years ago. Anamorphic drawings utilized mirrored cylinders, cones and pyramids to reflect a distorted image on paper into regular proportion. I wondered if this same technique could be used in conjunction with a three-dimensional object. A broken bottle seemed the perfect specimen for its multiple repositionable parts.

After countless hours of trouble-shooting my efforts were rewarded and I recreated the image of a bottle with its broken parts within a mirrored glass cone and titled the piece, *Anamorph for a Common Occurrence* (fig.1-2). Historically, the mirrored objects used in anamorphosis seem to all be made from polished metal that was carried in leather satchels, so I decided to recreate such an object in glass. After hand-blowing a glass cone, I utilized a process from the glass industry to mirror its surface. My interest in creating the cone in glass seemed appropriate in terms of my delicate subject: the glass bottle. I wanted the object reflecting the image to be just as delicate and vulnerable.

After working with objects with pre-existing damage, I decided to begin a project where I created disorder. *Increment/Decrement* (fig.3-4) was created by tediously sawing vertically through a fallen branch of an elm tree. Each half of the branch was re-created in cast crystal glass and matched with its wooden counterpart. Thus, the installation consists of two new branches that are opposites of each other: half of the original branch and half crystal. Crystal has been regarded throughout the centuries for its mythological abilities to heal. I entertained this notion when choosing it as a material to fill the void of each missing half of the branch. Its optical clarity and ability to magnify complimented the concept of its purpose in the piece: to portray absence and presence simultaneously.

Thesis

The four pieces in my thesis installation connect to previous work and further embody themes of entropy and temporality. Contemplating the term entropy on a geographic scale led to the theory and title of my first piece, *Pangaea* (fig. 5). Pangaea (*pan* meaning *entire* and *gaea* meaning *earth*, in Ancient Greek) is the super continent that existed 250 million years ago during the Paleozoic and Mesozoic eras before the continents dispersed. I wanted to convey the theory of Pangaea through a recognizable object in a sculpture. Thinking of the physical land lead me to ruminations on archeology and the layering of the human race within it through artifacts and our bones. Like *Pangaea*, the human skull is formed of many parts that fuse together to make one. As we grow into adulthood, the fissures separating the parts of our skulls join together leaving behind subtle gestures in the bone. In an effort to negate this form of entropy, I wanted to separate these parts once again. Searching through medical books, I discovered a drawing that depicted a human skull with all of its parts extracted in a pattern on the page. Curiously, the image was a new, refreshing, beautiful, and mysterious depiction of the skull, as we typically know it. The pattern of deconstructed parts seemed reminiscent of Rorschach patterns, quiet and explosive all at the same time. In order to amplify the characteristics that I envisioned, I decided to cast all of the 22 skulls parts in a material that would convey an ephemeral experience. Once again, the choice was crystal. Once the set of crystal bones

was complete, I designed a table of steel, mirrored and clear sheet glass that would defy the conventional museum and scientific displays. A mirror in the piece allows the objects to reflect upon themselves or dissolve below. Holograms of each piece exist in an air space between the mirror and the clear layer of glass above where the bones lay (fig. 6). Within this sculpture, the parts of the skull exist in both tangible and intangible forms, a representation of our conscious and subconscious states of being.

Continuing to work with the pattern created in the sculpture *Pangaea*, I decided to photograph each piece and reassemble them on a black background in *Drift* (fig. 7). The black background creates an image where the crystal parts seem to float in a void or black hole. In his book, *Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Philosopher Edmund Burke refers to the absence of light as sublime through what is “dark, uncertain, and confused,” due to what it may veil. Time slows in this piece. The image may seem beautiful and horrific at the same time. Its static state begs for a ripple of movement. Poised within a black abyss, the crystal parts remain ephemeral and remind us of the transience of our being in a time when our worldly state of affairs create an uncertain path for our future.

A closer investigation of the land in Richmond occurred through my interaction with the part of the James River that surrounds Belle Isle. Evidence of entropy has taken its toll on the many boulders in the riverbed. Over time, powerful revolutions in the water called kolks, churn small river stones. This action results in the stones carving sizable holes over time into the boulders, creating cervices over the years. The aftermath of this natural force is impressive. The voids left behind symbolize pockets of time; there

surfaces, portals. I was difficult for me to fathom the amount of time it took the river to create the many holes of various depths as well as the events in history that coincided with each layer weathered away. Rethinking notions of repair, I devised a way to utilize a boulder containing two of these holes to repair itself in a photographic image in *Irreversible* (fig. 8-9). Cut panes of mirror were inserted into the surface of each uniquely shape hole. Outside of the camera's view I held a large mirror that served to reflect the boulder's surface into the mirrors covering the holes. The documentation of this event depicts the holes covered with a stone surface that resembles Photoshop images. The ability of simple materials and reflection to attain the aesthetic of technology contrasts the truly irreversible qualities of these voids and parallels our global struggle to reconstruct what has been lost. The mirrors create the illusion of stone in a fantastical way and create another representation or portal of time. In the final installation, a small scallop shaped chip can be found at the edge of one of the mirrors. I decided to leave this imperfection as a result of the process as well as to serve as a third portal of time. This is noteworthy in the light of Douglas Crimp's essay *The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism* where he defines Walter Benjamin's interest the "*presence of the subject that is photographed.*" As Benjamin says "*the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character of the picture.*" Crimp states, "*For Benjamin, then, the connoisseurship of photography is an activity diametrically opposed to the connoisseurship of painting: it means looking not for the hand of the artist but for the*

uncontrolled and uncontrollable intrusion of reality, the absolutely unique and even magical quality not of the artist but of his subject.”

Finally, one of the most universal things lost between people is time. Throughout my many years of schooling I recall the countless days my fellow classmates and I glanced at the same generic wall clocks in any classroom on any day of the week. I find the ability of such a simple mechanism to acquire so much attention and to allocate so much control over our lives quite remarkable. Another object from my childhood that I felt was pretty universal to all is that of the ship in a bottle. A ship can be symbolic of departure, exploration and discovery. I desired to combine these two iconic images and create a kinetic sculpture that would portray society’s mortal connection to time in a humorous way.

Time not only wears on the landscape (as mentioned above), but on us as well. It manifests its presence in our bodies both physically and mentally. Our lives seem to be vested in lapses of time that teeter between “good” and “bad.” Time situates the present. It creates memories and develops a past and creates hope for the future. In *The Dialectic of Duration*, Gaston Bachelard creates notions of space and time through rhythm. In my sculpture *Duration*, time literally drags the figure of a man down, and then serendipitously lifts him up (fig. 10-11) in a continuous rhythm. Bachelard proposes, “Ploughed fields depict figures of duration every bit as clearly as figures of space: they show us the rhythm of human toil.” Quotes like this from Bachelard serve as inspiration to continue exploring these concepts.

Influences

Artists of influence include: Gordon Matta-Clark, Joan Jonas, Robert Smithson, Giuseppe Penone, Joseph Bueys, Bruce Nauman, Robert Morris, Charles Ray, Do-Ho Suh, Fred Tomaselli, Janine Antoni, Mark Dion, Joep Van Lieshout, and Roni Horn (among many others). Their innovative approaches to art remind me to constantly re-invent my work and myself.

For example, in 2002, I had the pleasure of viewing Bruce Nauman's installation, *Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)*. In this piece, viewers are allowed to coast along the gallery floor via rolling desk chairs surrounded by seven projections and multiple audio tracks of ambient sounds from Nauman's studio. At first, the footage of Nauman's desolate studio seems mundane. However, with patience, viewers begin to witness the nocturnal activity of cats, mice, moths, etc.. A real time experience is created due to the fact that the footage never loops itself over the course of the gallery's viewing hours. This work remains refreshing to me due to the fact that it maps (as Nauman says) “the leftover parts and work areas of the last several years of other completed, unfinished, or discarded projects.” Nauman created something beautiful from nothing in his studio, and that is truly inspiring.



Figure 1



Figure 2

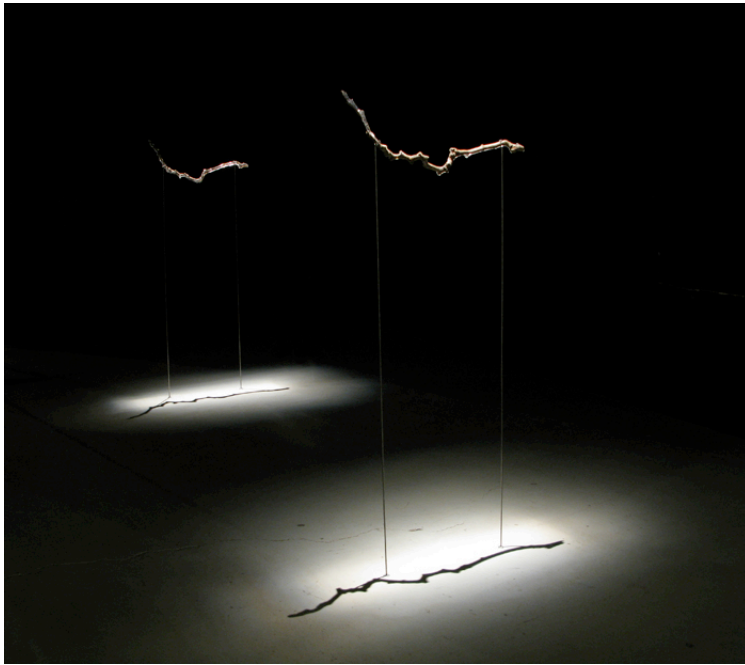


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

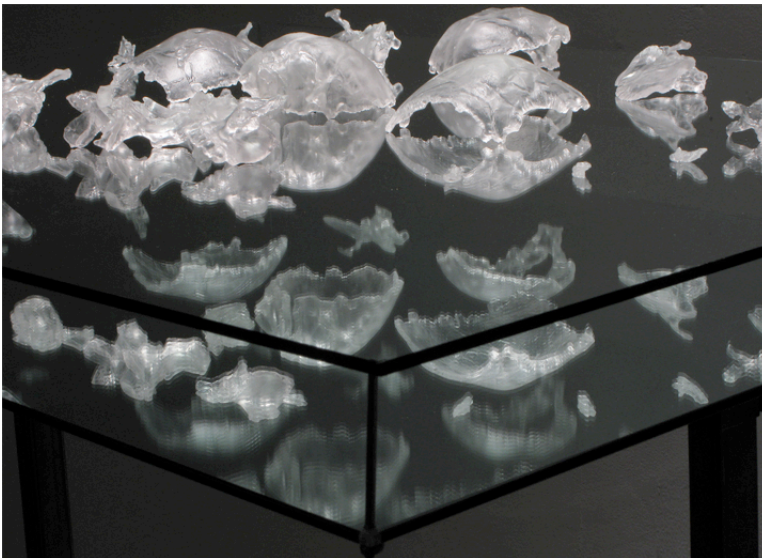


Figure 6

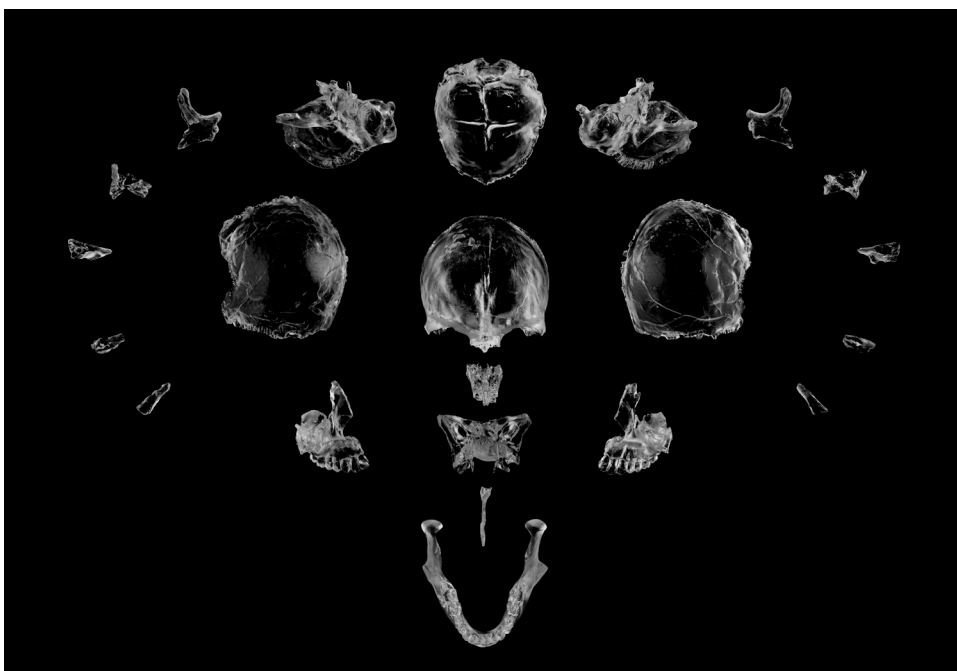


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

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Crimp, Douglas. "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism." *October*, Vol 15, (Winter 1980), pp. 91-101, The MIT Press.

Dia Center for the Arts, <http://www.diaart.org/dia/press/nauman.html>

VITA

EDUCATION

- 2008 Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA MFA
 2003 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI BFA, Glass

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 *MFA Graduate Thesis Exhibition*, Anderson Gallery VCU School of the Arts, Richmond, VA
Grey Area Stake Out, Crane Arts, Philadelphia, PA
VCU/PRATT MFA Exchange Show, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY
 2007 *MFA Biennial*, Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts, Wilmington, DE
Radius 250, Art Space Gallery, Richmond, VA
We and Us, PLAYSPACE Gallery, San Francisco, CA
 2006 *Glass '06*, Wheeler Gallery, Providence, RI
Bathwater, FAB Gallery, Richmond, VA
Real Party, Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT
 2005 *The Fellows 2005*, Creative Glass Center of America, Millville, NJ
 2004 *Thinking In Glass*, Concord Art Association, Concord, MA
Paperworks, Providence Art Club, Providence, RI
Fidelity Investments Annual Glass and Photography Show, Providence Art Club, Providence, RI
Trustee Exhibition, Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
Rhode Island School of Design Glass Triennial (guest alumni), Woods Gerry Gallery, Providence, RI
 2003 *RISD Senior Glass Show*, The Firehouse, Providence, RI
 2002 *Artist Guild Show*, Newport Art Museum, Newport, RI
Open Painting Show, Providence Art Club, Providence, RI
Meiosis, Sol Gallery, Providence, RI
 2000 *RISD Glass Triennial*, Woods Gerry Gallery, Providence, RI

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2008 Selected for China Worker's Center for International exchange (CWCIE), Cultural Exchange Program Team Member for Oct. 24- Nov.7, 2008 research in Shanghai, Jingdezhen and Beijing China led by artist in industry Matt Crane.
Travel Grant to Winterthur, DE Virginia Commonwealth University
Travel Grant to Philadelphia, PA Virginia Commonwealth University
Travel Grant to Brooklyn, NY Virginia Commonwealth University
Master's Thesis/Dissertation Fellowship, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2007 Reviewer for Rhode Island School of Design Student Portfolio Review, Providence, RI
Panelist for Rhode Island School of Design, *Be our Guest*, panel on residencies, Providence, RI
Travel Grant to Providence Rhode Island, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2006 Faculty Selection/Search Committee, Virginia Commonwealth University
Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship Nomination, Virginia Commonwealth University
MFA Graduate Scholarship, Virginia Commonwealth University
MFA Graduate Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University
Kohler Arts/Industry Residency, Sheboygan, WI
- 2005 *Creative Glass Center of America Fellowship*, Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville, NJ
- 2004 *Machine Art Sculpture Competition*, Riverfront Lofts, First Place, Pawtucket, RI
Fidelity Investments Annual Glass and Photography Show, Glass First Place, Providence Art Club, Providence, RI
- 2002 RISD & Pilchuck Glass School Full Partner Scholarship, Advanced Venetian Glassblowing, Andrea Zilio, Pilchuck Glass School Stanwood WA

LECTURES AND ARTIST TALKS

- 2008 *Visiting Artist Lecture*, Student's Choice Seminar, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE
- 2007 *MFA Artist Lecture*, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2006 *Visiting Artist Lecture*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI
Visiting Artist Lecture, University of Wisconsin-Sheboygan, Sheboygan, WI
Artist in Residence Lecture, The John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
- 2005 *Winter 2005 Fellowship Recipients Slide Show and Demonstration*, Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville, NJ

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2006 Apprentice (glassblowing) for Davide Salvatore, Murano, Italy
- 2005 Conservation Assistant for Margaret Leveque, Archaea-Technica, conservation of 2,500 year old Egyptian mummy and coffin ensemble for Iredell Museum, NC
- 2004 The Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, intern for Margaret Leveque, conservation lab, Providence, RI
Artist assistant for Mark Dion, 2005 New York MOMA exhibition: Rescue Archaeology, Beach Lake, PA

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- 2008 *Curious*, VCU press 2007
Emerging Artist in Glass, Featured Artist, Glass Art Society Newsletter 2008
- 2005 Creative Glass Center of America 2006 Fellowship Application Catalogue
- 2004 Neus Glas, The Corning Museum of Glass, New Glass Review, Issue 25
Rhode Island School of Design Catalog of Degree Programs

COLLECTIONS

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
Kohler Company, Kohler, WI
The Museum of American Glass, Millville, NJ
Private Collection, CT